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Media Sociology: An Appraisal

Headings

Abstract   The term media sociology most often refers to the study of various influences on media content, it encompasses the factors shaping media content for certain effects. Studies that look into the socialization of media workers, their professional attitude and many other things associated with them, found the absence of objectivity and abundance of biases in media content. They present a clear-cut version that whatever masses consume is the mediated content in one way or another. Whereas, some studies seem to declare objectivity in media content not more than a myth. This review article solely revolves around the question "what factors inside and outside of the media organizations influence the media content?" The researchers reviewed a large number of research articles and dissertations regarding media sociology and added valuable contribution to literature.

Introduction

This research study offers a review of top-ranked, declared as key works in the media sociology field. It also identifies the key themes in both sociology research that contributes to media studies and media research that contributes to sociological studies. Giving the interdisciplinary kind of media and communication analysis, identifying the boundaries of media sociology and presenting a clear-cut and acceptable distinction among sociology, media and other approaches are indeed not an easy task to accomplish within the scientific research boundaries (Briggs and Burke 2005). Hence, media sociology is known as research that positions media and communication research within the underlying forces of sociology and relates them to queries about, conflict, authority, order, satisfaction, identity, community, institutions and power (Badsey 2000).

Media from its inception to now, from cave paintings to fashion industry, from pigeon to satellite, from smoke signals to wireless signals, from horse runners to SMS, in short, all the time media stood responsible to inform, to entertain and to educate the masses (Mcpherson 2002). In its nature, media is not a single hand process. It is a complete organized system, from its idea to the distribution of content, it works with the help of many hands. According to Dr. Zafar Iqbal, professor of media studies at International Islamic University Islamabad Pakistan, there is not a dead hand behind the media content rather there is a life behind it, which is influenced by the emotions, circumstances, environment, power blocks, and so forth. So, the media content that we consume every day is mediated and influenced by one or other way. While, Dr. Shabbir Hussain, associate professor at Bahria University Islamabad, says that the objectivity in the media content is not more than a myth. Media content had never been and will never be objective in its nature, biases in media content is logical.

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Lucy Kung mentioned in his book 'Strategic management in the media' (2008) that the media is not monolithic in its operations but rather it is a conglomeration of different industries that creates visibly mediated content with the influence of many internal and external factors (Kung 2008). The traditional boundaries of the media and entertainment industry have become meaningless" (Eide 2015).

Oliver Bomsel (2013) narrates that communication society runs like biotope, where media receives and re-omits and then distributes the public messages to a uniform social environment. Media extensively participates to integrate the coordinating factors of the society in making it unidirectional, although media is neither formally nor informally responsible nor systematically bond to perform for the functionalism of society. Such an ecosystem makes people rely on an invisible socially responsible model of media to conjure up an ideal society by subjugating dispersed components of the society(Bomsel, 2013).

Jonathan Cohen narrates in his research article that the power of media tantalizes politicians and they want to be featured in the media coverage at any cost. He founded that politicians believe that their survival lies in the frequent existence in the media coverage and on the other hand media organizations believe that their survival lies in the second by second coverage of parliamentary affairs. So, the politicians influence media content and media want to be influenced for its survival (Cohen 2008). The politicians influence media content at multiple levels. According to Dr. Shabbir Hussain that it is guaranteed that media content either will reflect the emotions/bias of its writer, editor, organization or its advertiser (Hussain 2017).

Election studies on media framing and media bias show that media tries to change the voting behavior of its viewers by its content and certain trends in election days. Several cross sectional survey researches at different times (Daniela V. Dimitrova, Adam Shehata & Jesper Strömbäck, 2011, Leonard Tipton, Roger D. Haney & John R. Baseheart, 1975, Lawrence R. Jacobs and Robert Y. Shapiro, 2005) came upon this point at similar results that media shows up its power in election campaigns by highlighting certain issues to change the voting behavior of voters. The overnight change in voting behavior is historically evident that has been noted by the aforementioned scholars (Dimitrova and Strömbäck 2011). Agenda setting scholarship especially McComb and Shaw (1972) endorsed that media has power to make the salient issues as non-issues and non-issues as salient issues to set the public agenda. Issues saliency of media is not idiosyncratic anymore. It is verily identified that media seems to serve the agenda of someone by technically twisting the angle/frame of certain issues. A large number of media scholars take their way to gauge and measure the effects of media content. By surfing their subways, they are found digging up about framing, agenda setting, and cultivation effects of media.

Gurbner (1969) conducted a scientific study on the media content titled *violence and the media*, commonly considered a landmark study among media scholarship, this study revolves around the media practitioner 'who' a term coined by the Herald Laswell(Gurbner, 1969), denoting the media professionals or journalists working on the tasks given by their concerned media organizations. Every media practitioner tends to persuade target audience defined by the organization he is working for.
"*Who says what through which channel with what effects*"

But according to the Shoemaker (1996), a fewer proportion of media scholars vest their energies to look-back to the construction of message and to identifying that why the construction of media content is so, as objectionable, negative in its effects. A huge number of media scholars have been and still working on the structure of media (Shoemaker P. J., 1996). Their books and researches show that they are highly concerned with the process of media that how does it work and what effects media-message leaves on its audiences. Seminal work on message system by Carl Hovland done in 1951, 1953, 1961, amidst attitude change and persuasion. These studies widely covered the practitioner/communicator's concern regarding the content of the message and its role in opinion-making. Hovland (1961) discovered and tested typology of message and its implications.

Media scholars like Rees, Pamela Shoemaker, Hoveland and Ball Rokeach have identified many factors that influence and shape media contents and, on another hand, media with its powerful impact influences and shapes many things, like decision making, opinion building, establishment of climate of opinion, molding

social dimensions and narrative, even it forms governments. Specifically, after the arrival of social media people have been aware of the importance of media content and its role in different parts of life. Before becoming a proper academic course to be studied, the media has been used between 1920s to idealize colonization of British rule. The establishment of BBC and Reuters and the role they played during colonization are the perfect examples of this. Before going into depth, to discuss how media can influence many things first we have to understand those factors which have profound effects on mass media.

Many researchers are agreed and are of the view that the relation between media and its audiences are interlinked. They have an enormous impact on each other and they reciprocate each other in many ways. Media prepares its content on the basis of the availability of its audience and their requirements. Media outlets design their cue sheet/program cycle or program clock in accordance with the audience demand and to hit their emotions, to achieve the required goals, demanded by the advertiser or sponsor. Media dependency model presented by S. J Ball Rakeach says that media content is greatly affected by people who consume it. (Rakeach 1976)

Another critical point of view about shaping media content is that the powerful and elite class of society shapes the content of media to have their goals achieved. According to this claim, media serve the ruling and powerful segment of any society. Agenda setting theory, media framing theory are examples of this perception that scientifically show how media frame any specific activity in order to achieve someone else's goals.

Besides having the powerful potential of media scientists have also shown their limitations which oblige media organizations to serve the elite. Propaganda model of media presented by Noam Chomsky is basically about the limitations of the freedom of any media organization. Noam Chomsky states the basic factors like Advertising, ownership, etc which are used to propagate any news or event in the favor of Elite. (chomsky, 1978)

However, the power of media on shaping opinions and perception of masses cannot be denied. Katz (1974) in international encyclopedia of social and behavior science says that people either resist to the media content shown to them or they accept them and bow their heads; even if a population resists media content they cannot prevail in their resistance.

The Origin of Media Sociology

A vast majority of communication scholarship is of the view that foundation/origin of media and communication research is clearly grounded in the field of sociology. The scholar who first charted out the key themes of media and communication field in 1920, in the United States, was a sociologist. The foundational research was stemmed out from a core sociological question, such as '*the integrative role of the media in the transition from traditional to modern societies and the community-building dimensions of the media*'. In short, the media studies and sociology are inextricably inter-connected and also inter-dependent. During the world war-II, media sociology of the United States observed two major transitions; geographical transition and analytical transition. Geographically, (Thornham 2004), the centre of media sociological studies shifted from Chicago University to Harvard and Columbia Universities, and research-prone focus shifted from media and news to mass communication and public opinion. Analytically, the focus moved from the nexus between modern society and media to a broader question about the persuasion and war propaganda (chomsky 1978). By the financial support of the United States government and private sector organizations, the public opinion grabbed notable attention from media/communication scholars and researchers in the 1950s. However, the sociological approaches focusing on the structural issues gradually lost their academic centrality. This checkmating shift indicated the researchable gap in the media communication field and sociology in the United States. Apparently, by the end of the 20th century, the media sociology has got a notable space in academic field of research (H.R, 2007).

Media Studies as Academic Field

The Contemporary media is not practically a monolithic concept, it is a mixture of many borrowed concepts from other fields, like, sociology, psychology, anthropology, history, etc. scholarship of all academic disciplines must touch media to validate and materialize their theoretical conceptual grounds. With the wide range of knowledge availability and so many divisions in courses, it is now difficult and confusing to attach one course with another which in fact would be relatively attached with the same topic. For example, sociology and social psychology, both are separate areas of study but still related to each other and rely on each other's theories. Similarly, media science or media studies are not a monolithic concept but a mixture of different areas of studies that collectively make it an individual course of studies. The effect of different theories from different fields, like psychology and sociology, on media studies, is the example of this claim.

There are different views of researcher on the basic evolution of media studies and its origin. For example, Kafle (2007), a researcher of media studies, in his article "media discourse" claimed that media traces back to cultural studies in 1920s. According to him, during 1920s media was strongly affected by European culture and was representing their colonized propaganda in magazines and radio and other traditional media.

Another media studies expert Thornham and O'Sullivan believe that media studies came from Sociology and English which later took the shape of vocational training (Thornham, 2004) While realizing the power and necessity of media in society and state it took the form of a proper course which is till today taught in educational institutes as well as vocational training institutes.

From the above discussion, we can say that media studies is not a separate area of knowledge but a mixture of social science including cultural studies, English, history and psychology. It is widely being affected by all these areas of study. Unlike other fields of studies like physics or bio or even calculus, it is interlinked with the basic theories and concepts of sociology and anthropology and hence we can shortly say it can be considered as a mixture of other branches of social sciences.

The Process and Effects

A notable part of social sector is dependent on media, like advertising/marketing, communication/telecommunication, film industries and to some extent technology, though it is established consensus that media is dependent on technology but dependency of technology on media also cannot be denied. Media because of its immense effect on people and manipulative qualities became an important tool for different areas of business (Schudson 1989). Using media can share knowledge about a product or service to masses of people convincing them to consume that certain product or service. Hence all industries use media to maximize impact while minimizing cost (Gustav Ichheiser 1970). Advertising industry has become a large beneficial industry by using media to advertise. Many big companies spend huge amount of money on advertising for the purpose of awareness and their product sale. According to 2016 annual business report, Samsung spent $ 9.9 billion on advertising while Ali baba spent a total amount of $ 267 billion which is a huge amount of money. The statistics show the importance of media in the advertising industry (Fourie 2001).

Analyzing Media Content

Fishman (1980) maintains a strategic distance from the presumption of a target outside the reality by characterizing social reality as that which a general public think about itself. "New is what a Journalist makes," reality lies in the mechanism of construction of news content. There are numerous wellsprings of data about society, social reality and construction of reality, additionally a particular occasion, some of them are self-evident. Numerous data sources are not as self-evident of the conceivably immense number of data sources, each gives its own bit of social reality (Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch 2009).

Molding Social Reality

That is media content that takes components of culture, amplifies them, outlines them, and feeds them back to a group of people. Media forces their very own rationale in making an emblematic situation. On the off chance that we expect that culture must change, adjust, and improve, at that point media substance may fill in as either an impetus for or a brake on this change. By depicting ladies as homemakers, substance might amplify a part of truth (ladies used to be found essentially in those jobs), yet the quality and inescapability of those images may make it progressively hard for ladies to be acknowledged in no cliché jobs(Shoemaker P. , 1987). When media content is manipulated by components at a larger amount of investigation, that is, outside of the media association, at that point the open door is extraordinary for control of media content by additional media powers looking to fill their very own needs. Generous impacts on media content from the Ideology of the amazing would show expansive and inescapable consequences for society. We swing alongside break down these impacts (Goh, Heng and Lin 2013).

Influence of Individual on Content

The biggest factor that extensively influences media content is the journalist himself, the individual who works for media. He is overall a human being and it is natural for him to have attachments, emotional, sexual, social etc., affiliation, fear, enthusiasm. Ultimately, he has to be biased in any way. Sometimes he shows biasness because of life, security, job threats, sometimes he shows his biasness because of love, affection with individual, group, party, or country (Plesner 2010). According to Zilzer, media can never be objective, a lot many forces compel it to be biased. Journalism has always been about people's lives and what is happening around them. The current news or the trending issues in surroundings are related to human beings either it is social or political. The biggest factor that affects media content is a human being himself. According to Becket (2016), journalism is an emotionally charged networked environment(Becket, 2016). People involved in making media content are obliged to have emotional attachments towards a group or ideology. Especially in today's global era people are significantly affected by their emotional attachments (Bardoel and Deuze 2001). Stephen J.A Ward in 2010 clearly said that the journalists are not automatic machines but human beings bound with their emotions which might result in abuse of their contents and reporting (Ward 1996). A handsome number of scholars say that we have explored how correspondence specialists' attributes, individual and expert foundations, individual frames of mind, and expert jobs can impact media content (Valkenburg and Peter 2013).

Influence of Media Routines

In the modern world, media is the key source of communication. It connects people as well as aware them of their basic rights and the fresh occurrences all around the globe. Any media organization work in a proper systematic way having their own policy, editorial board and financial supporters. This systematic way of running a media organization is referred to as media routine or we can say that the way according to which any media organization must work. It complies with the values and credibility of media content. Pamela shoemaker is of the view that media routine has a greater influence on media content especially news making. Before the modern technological advancement journalist had not any idea to measure their audience or know their audience feedback but with the arrival of new technology now media practitioner can see their audience traffic and get the idea of public mind (Strömbäck and Dimitrova 2011).

Organizational Influence on Content

Media organizations relatively design/structure content to develop their political economy. It is evident that all the media organizations have their political/financial affiliations with many political or economic groups. So, media, for their own earning/capital, design or influence its contents. The essential objective looks for by most media associations is the financial benefit. News associations, specifically, have confronted

developing monetary weights that presently assume a more noteworthy job in directing journalistic choices (Andrews and Caren 2010). This authoritative point of view uncovers the setting inside which the schedules of media work are done. Obviously, these associations themselves are liable to their very own cutoff points forced by their condition (Djankov, et al. 2010).

Influence of Extra Media Forces on Content

Many extra media forces like pressure groups, militaries, power-blocks, bureaucracy, multinational organizations, powerful other countries supported NGOs and many other extra media groups believe that maintaining their good well on the media is the only way to rule over the market/society/world. Hence it is a universal truth that media has an enormous impact on public opinion-making and shaping the perceptions of public. Many corporate sections and big icons use media to strengthen their economy and gain public's sympathy. It is normally believed in high societies that without the support of media their gains would not be able to be achieved.

According to human psychology, human beings strive for power and authority either it is in financial form or any other form. To gain this power people go beyond the standards of morality or ethics. Politicians and Generals the most common segment of many countries that are involved in filling up their bank accounts with public money (Yoo and Alavi 2001).

The Influence of Ideology on Content

The media has been alluded to as "The Fourth Estate" with the significant capacity of being the news media – "the press" – and filling in as the eyes and ears of people in general. The customary print and media revealing has been seen after some time as the best approach to protect that the public gets the genuine scoop on the working of government and perspectives of political up-and-comer (Kobland, Kwon and Liping 1992).

According to Diana Owen, an American professor of media, there is proof to recommend that the new media enable political pioneers to complete an end-go around the guard dog press (Owen 1998). Somehow or another, the press has moved from being a guard dog to a mouthpiece for legislators. This inclination is exacerbated by the way that there is a spinning entryway where working columnists move between positions in the media and government. A few researchers keep up this spinning entryway bargains the objectivity of columnists who view an administration work as the wellspring of their next check (Mcluhan and Lewis 1994).

Conclusion

After reviewing a huge amount of literature, it is found that there are many powerful factors that influence media contents throughout the world, regardless of any distinction of first, second and third world. From east to west and north to south the power groups, pressure groups, business tycoons, political and religious groups have a strong influence over media organizations, because they believe that their presence in the media will enhance their scope in the market. So, they invest their power and energy to shackle the media organizations. In such circumstances, it becomes impossible for media to work independently and freely. The researcher investigated and examined all those possible factors which influence and shape media contents.

A widely accepted and agreed upon duty of media was to present such a content that should reflect social reality with no major distortion. After reviewing a large number of articles and dissertations, the researcher is morally bound to conclude that the content that media is presenting and representing is idiosyncratic and imaginary in nature with no reflection of the social reality at all. As Pamela Shoemaker raised a question in her book 'mediating the message' that if media in its contents does not present the accurate/transparent reality then what does it present? She further says that media presents its own

structural logic of reproduction of its content. Surely, social reality is manipulated when characters and events are relocated into news stories and prime-time discourses to visualize social reality. Therefore, a clear distinction can be observed between the real world and media world (cultivation studies).

Many studies argue that whether there is an objective reality beyond the individual's perception. The world view through the media constructs a fabricated reality of the world in audience's perception. Because we perceive the reality through our human senses, the nature and limits of our senses design the reality of the world, which is absolutely relative world reality. Scholars have concluded that there is no reality of the world apart from our ability to perceive it. In this contemporary age, when media is too much powerful and active, the only source of knowledge and have gained an authoritative position in our bio-tape and social echo-system. We have to rely on whatever media is inculcating us and our generations. Media intrinsically, mold the reality through its technical orchestration of content.

The researchers have finally reached to the point that the ideologies of journalists, professional background, personal background, socio-cultural and socio-economic background, personal attitude and defined professional roles can strongly influence and shape media content. Anyhow, we firmly believe that ideally a communicator's experience, educational background and ideologies should not affect the media content but the media content may be effected to the extent that such kind of factors influence both professional and personal attitudes and roles. Out of these two attitudinal variables, the professional attitude has a lot to do with and profoundly influence the media content more than the personal attitude, beliefs and values.

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